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ABSTRACT

A description of the St. Martin Parish French/English bilingual project, one of five such programs in Louisiana, is presented. Now in its fifth year of operation, the St. Martin project serves the rural communities of Breaux Bridge and Parks, in classes from kindergarten through grade 5. Detailed here are the project's policies on staff development, curriculum planning and implementation, and progress reporting. Activities of the Parent Advisory Committee, involving parents of project participants and other interested community members, are also described. The following four factors lending supportive evidence for the success of the bilingual education program in St. Martin Parish are summarized: (1) Studies show that approximately 85 percent to 90 percent of the performance objectives for both the English and French areas of instruction have been achieved by 70 percent or more of the students; (2) pre- and posttest comparisons reveal that bilingual education program students do as well as or better than nonbilingual students on achievement tests; (3) differences in grade equivalent scores are significantly higher in favor of bilingual education students; (4) the Bilingual Education Program has been strongly supported by members of the community. (Author/PMP)

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PRESENTATION

BILINGUAL EDUCATION
THE LOUISIANA STORY:
TEACHING FRENCH TO FRENCH SPEAKING CHILDREN

BY

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION

THE LOUISIANA STORY:

TEACHING FRENCH TO FRENCH SPEAKING CHILDREN

One year after "Bilingual Education" was initiated in 1967 with the enactment by Congress of the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII) of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the first French/English Bilingual Education Program came into being in Greenville, New Hampshire. The following year five (5) other such programs were funded - three (3) in the New England sector and our first two in Louisiana - the St. Martin Parish Project and the Lafayette Parish Project. Today Louisiana has five (5) French/English bilingual programs - the Iberia Parish Project was funded in 1973 and the Evangeline Parish and St. Landry Parish Projects in 1974. These five (5) projects serve a pupil population of approximately 4,000, of which roughly 65% are classified as French dominant and 35% English dominant. Each linguistic group is racially mixed.

Our five (5) projects are located in the center of the predominately French section of Louisiana, commonly referred to as Acadiana, where most of the descendants of French and Acadian inhabitants originally settled. Through the ensuing years the language and culture have remained virtually intact. There has been an influx of other ethnic groups into the area; some groups have influenced the language, others have brought in the Anglo influence. In the urban areas the language has begun to fade but in the rural areas both language and culture remain in predominance. Due to the lack of bilingual programs in the past and the emphasis of our American society on the melting pot philosophy, few children today arrive at school

with no knowledge of English; however, many are linguistically handicapped and ill equipped to compete in a completely standard English situation.

The goals of bilingual education have been tailored to meet parent-student-community needs in Acadiana by providing the educational opportunities to develop greater competence in English for children with limited English speaking ability, to develop literacy in French for the English speaking child, to develop ever increasing competence in the use of the two languages for the children who are already bilingual at an early age but speak a non-standard variety of both languages and to build in the children an appreciation and pride in their natural heritage and a respect for cultural differences. To meet these goals our bilingual programs are implementing a strong, activity centered English curriculum, a strong French program in which each child receives basic French instruction each day, instruction in French in the content areas and instruction based on culture and heritage.

Three of the Louisiana projects - St. Martin, Iberia, Evangeline, serve primarily a rural pupil population; whereas the Lafayette and St. Landry Projects are centered principally in the urban communities. Bilingual Projects in general are involved with four (4) major components: instruction, materials adaptation and development, staff development and community and parental involvement. The St. Martin Parish and Lafayette Parish Projects have concentrated very heavily on the development of curriculum. The two new projects, Evangeline and St. Landry, have an added innovative component - ETV. They are presently involved in developing a series of educational television programs to reinforce the learning of the children and to give them a knowledge and appreciation of their bilingual/bicultural heritage.

After having visited the Louisiana projects, I have found that generally each of the projects have many similarities in each of the components; however, I am unable to speak with any degree of authority on the specifics of each/or all. Therefore, this presentation will center around the specific components of our St. Martin Parish Project.

We are presently in our fifth year of operation in classes from kindergarten through grade five in two primary schools and two elementary schools in the rural communities of Breaux Bridge and Parks. There are 460 children in the program; of these 308 are classified as French dominant; 152 as English dominant. Of this number 297 are white and 163 are black. 57% of the white students are French dominant and 85% of the blacks are French dominant. When the program began, Specialist Teachers of French from Louisiana and Associate Teachers from France taught the French areas. Today in the majority of the classes the classroom teachers who are native speakers are teaching the Language Arts and the content areas in both languages.

To enhance all aspects of the program, there has been intensive staff development; pre-service and in-service education from Consultants, Teacher Trainers, Universities (in Louisiana, Canada and France) in such areas as rationale for bilingual education, French methodology, basic French, French curriculum implementation, French and English implementation of Career Education in the curriculum, effective teaching skills, grouping and reinforcement practices. Comparable pre and in-service training for the English areas has also been implemented, as well as training in early childhood education, cultural relevancy and evaluation procedures.

The French curriculum has been locally developed by the project. It is divided into units and each unit is designed to include instruction in language arts, social science, culture, math and science concepts, music, art and physical education. It is the belief of this project that the teaching-learning process is more functional when all content areas of instruction are integrated. Concepts in the content areas for instruction are correlated in both French and English. Students learn their concepts in one language and these are reinforced in the other.

The general approach at kindergarten level is one of oral language development. Emphasis is placed on activities which promote more extensive listening and speaking skills. In grade one, oral language development is continued, with expansion of vocabulary and structures. Emphasis is placed on learning through involvement, inquiry and discovery. Great care is taken to design curriculum which project children can localize, personalize and internalize. The curriculum guides used are interspered with innumerable mimes, dialogues, dramatizations, games, and activities which provide the student varieties of opportunities to practice newly acquired skills. Auditory discrimination, games, songs, art activities and poems are also included. Project developed games teach vocabulary which will be used in reading in grade 2. Other games and exercises are used to develop psychomotor skills, visual descrimination, association of ideas, spatial organization, seriation, sequence, etc.

In grade 2 students are exposed to the formal reading. The reading series from "La Méthode Dynamique," published by the Centre de Pédagogie

Dynamique, is being utilized by the project. The methodology centers on the involvement and discovery by the child. Techniques involve not only comprehension but also oral expression. The students are able to write sentences with vocabulary and structures they have studied and which are familiar to them.

The grade 2 curriculum guides, as do the guides in grades 3 and 4, continue to develop the language arts and the content areas, with the concepts of career education and culture and heritage included. The children learn about their families, communities, public services, the weather, the resources, industries, occupations, their culture and heritage, flowers, wild life, etc. typical of the area. Examples of integrated units involving our heritage and culture are "Les Ecrevisses," "La Boucherie," "Les Acadiens," "Le Sel," "La Roulaison," "La Paroisse de St. Martin." Locally developed slides, transparencies, tapes and illustrations of local landmarks, customs and industries accompany the units.

Project developed language master cards, cyclo teacher wheels, tapes, activities provide individualized instruction in phonics, vocabulary, grammatical structures, reading and writing skills, math skills. Various types of grouping (interest, ability, small heterogeneous with peer leaders) for instructional purposes are utilized. A variety of instructional experiences, such as: field trips to acquaint children with learning experiences and their cultural heritage, enrichment and motivational activities, educational games and audio-visual media are provided. Heavy emphasis is placed on creative writing in grades 3 on up in both the French

and English areas. The students also enjoy participating in a cultural exchange with children in some of the schools in France.

To measure gains made in the French area, the project has developed French Achievement Tests which are criterion referenced. A different test has been designed for each grade level. Tests are based on bilingual education French performance objectives in the areas of language arts and math. Following field testing and item analysis, items selected for use in the finalized tests at each grade level are numerically arranged according to level of difficulty as reflected in the item analysis.

The project has developed a continuous progress reporting system to parents as the program operates on a non-graded system. Parent/Teacher Conferences are held twice during the year. Newsletters are sent to parents at each reporting period to inform them of the French and English learning taking place in the classes. Examples of reinforcement activities for the home are included in each newsletter and bilingual teachers are available to guide parents on the use of these activities. Parents and members of the communities are invited to visit the classes on "Parent Visitation Day" to observe the learning process in two languages and to witness how each supports and reinforces the other. At the same time this involves parents in the Bilingual Program by fostering usage of both languages in the home and in the community.

Project parents and community members extend their project involvement through various Parent Advisory Committee activities and parents' written evaluation of the project. They are given additional opportunity for input

by reviewing the Application for Continuation, offering recommendations and giving their approval to the Continuation Application. The Parent Advisory Committee has 70% of its membership comprised of parents and the remaining 30% community members, including the mayors of the two communities being served by the Bilingual Education Program. The P.A.C. sponsors such activities as: scheduling parent training sessions for parents who assist with kindergarten registration and the screening of students for language dominance, utilizing the services of the bilingual Room Mothers and Mother Helpers to promote more effective home-school activities, scheduling training sessions for parents functionning on the Parent Evaluation Committee, scheduling parent teams for classroom visitations for written parent evaluation of the bilingual instructional component and subsequent report to the P.A.C. and the Parish School Board and sponsoring the annual Bilingual Education Parent Night at which time students perform in both the French and English areas.

The St. Martin Parish Project has had strong parental support. This year many parents who are not P.A.C. members have asked to attend P.A.C. meetings and have volunteered their services for various P.A.C. activities; parents have voiced great interest in the cultural exchanges in which their children are involved; many now have a renewed pride in bilingualism; there has been an increasing number of requests by parents for their children to be included in the Bilingual Program; many English dominant parents are proud that their children are teaching them and their other children French at home; parents are now going to the library to learn more about their heritage

since their children come home to talk about it.

There are four (4) major factors which lend supportive evidence to the effectiveness of bilingual education in our parish -

(1) Evaluations of the program show that approximately 85% to 90% of the performance objectives for both the English and French areas of instruction have been achieved by 70% or more of the students.

(2) Pre and post test comparisons document the fact that Bilingual Education Program students do as well as or better than school and parish norms of non bilingual students on standardized achievement tests.

(3) A comparison was made by Dr. Jeannette Gardiner, Professor of Early Childhood at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, for her dissertation of bilingual education second graders with a control group. The results showed that the differences in grade equivalent scores were significantly higher in favor of Bilingual Education students.

(4) Strong support of the Bilingual Education Program by members of the communities.